Before dusk we noticed a change in the river. It was widening, and we could not find its main current. We poled the raft to the left bank. This was an inviting place to camp for the night—level ground covered with lush grass, with huge trees widely separated from one another, straight as columns in a cathedral. We tied the raft to a tree and climbed up the bank to reconnoiter. The river had become a wide lake. The tempestuous Chelyasin was far away at the right. To the left was a wall of dead trunks piled one on top of another. In some places the wall was as high as the living trees on the shore. The ends of the dam were hidden by rising fog.

We unloaded our luggage and made a big fire. The night was beautiful. The foliage, illuminated by the fire, formed a green vault over our heads. The air was fragrant, and the murmur of leaves and water sounded like mysterious music.

LOST IN THE TAIGA

In the morning we went to explore the river. It was blocked from shore to shore by a log jam of trees brought down from the mountains by floods. Here and there living trees had grown through the Cyclopic pile. We pulled the raft along the edge of the barrier and climbed on top of the dam. On one side we saw the lake and, far away, the river; on the other, a maze of tree trunks. We tried to cross the dam by climbing and jumping from tree to tree but progress was slow. Several times we fell from slippery trunks, or a rotten log gave way under our feet. Late in the evening we returned to our camp, bruised and exhausted, and stretched ourselves beside the fire.

The next day Mikhail went along the left edge of the dam while I explored its right flank. Neither of us could reach the open river beyond the barrier, but we learned that the woods left of the dam were full of streams running in all directions while the opposite shore was dry and rising. After sunset we transferred our camp to the high bank. In the morning we continued our exploration and late in the afternoon came to a clearing overlooking a river. This could not be the mainstream of the Chelyasin, but it might be one of its branches. We decided to move our tent to this river and build a new raft there. Our provisions were running out, and Mikhail suggested that we ration the food.

Back at camp, we dismantled our raft. The ropes that had held it together seemed to be in fair condition. Then we carried our luggage to the new camp site in two installments. The distance was hardly more than four or five miles, but it seemed like a very long operation.

We put up our tent on a narrow level strip of land along the river